

HB 603 -- Intervention Options for Struggling Schools

Sponsor: Jones (110)

This bill allows the parents of students who attend a public school that is identified as performing in the bottom 20% of schools the previous year based on the School Improvement Program scoring guide to petition to convert or transform the school to one of several models. The restart model converts a school or closes and reopens the school under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization. School closure closes a school and distributes the students to other schools in reasonable proximity. The transformation model focuses on changing school leadership, while the turnaround model changes leadership, a percentage of staff, and governance.

The restart model requires the school to develop and increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, to employ comprehensive instructional reform, to increase learning time and engage the family and community, and to provide operational flexibility and support with a specified series of strategies. The turnaround model requires replacing the principal and replacing at least 50% of the staff, offering incentives and enhanced professional development to staff, adopting a new governance structure, use of student data, increasing learning time, and providing social-emotional and community-oriented services for students. Both the transformation and turnaround models have additional permissible strategies specified in the bill.

If parents representing at least 51% of the students attending the school or living in the attendance area, and in the case of a middle school or high school, the schools that feed into them sign a petition requesting one of the interventions, the district must implement the requested option. Signatures can be submitted only when they have surpassed the 51% level, and the district must review the petition and verify the signatures within 45 days. If review discloses that the level of signatures is insufficient, a three-person review board will resolve questions about the signatures. If the review board confirms that there are not enough signatures, the petitioners must have an additional 30 days to clear up discrepancies and to add additional signatures. Once the signatures have been verified, the district must reach a decision within 30 days. Unless the petitioners explicitly request otherwise, the district must implement the plan within 180 days or, in the case of a petition received after March 1, no later than the first day of the next school year. Petitioners must not be harassed, intimidated, or threatened and school or district resources cannot be used to support or oppose a petition.

If the school district approves a petition to convert a school to a charter school, the parents of a student who attends the school have the right to enroll their child in a different public school in the same district. The charter school must meet the existing charter school requirements. A charter operator must not have any schools in its portfolio in at least five years that are in the bottom-performing 50% of schools.

The district may make a finding that it is logistically impossible to implement the option requested by petition. If it does, it must state which other options it can implement and submit the issue to the State Board of Education within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, who will make a decision after a hearing officer reviews it and makes a recommendation. After a school has been reorganized, parents cannot submit another petition regarding the school for at least three years or before the last year of a charter school's charter term. If a school does not make significant gains in student progress in two years, the district must convert it to a charter school to be run by a charter management organization.

The department must promulgate regulations concerning the petition and appeals processes, the selection and authorization of charter school operators, and rescission of parent signatures. The department must also keep records about petition contents and outcomes.